# Sighted guiding (England)

13 December 2021

## Introduction

The principles below are intended for all blind and partially sighted individuals who require sighted guiding assistance, and have been developed in partnership by RNIB, Guide Dogs and Thomas Pocklington Trust. They are based on guidance in force in England on 13 December 2021 but people should stay up to date with “[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do)” and more detailed [current government COVID-19 advice](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus), as guidance is subject to change. This is particularly important as advice is likely to change at short notice as a result of the “Omicron” variant.

In the case of any ambiguity, government-issued guidance should always take precedence. **You should continue to follow all government coronavirus guidance, even if you’ve been vaccinated against COVID-19.**

The Department of Health and Social Care’s “[Getting help with daily activities outside your home during coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-people-outside-of-their-home/supporting-people-outside-of-their-home)” guidance provides advice for people who require support to get out and about. While there are currently no restrictions on numbers at gatherings or social distancing, individuals will be expected to use their own judgement to protect themselves and those around them.

Sighted guiding provides support for someone whose sight is not sufficient to safely negotiate an unfamiliar environment, from another person. Ordinarily it involves the person being guided keeping light contact with a guider’s elbow, standing alongside and slightly behind to the left or right, depending on personal preference. While moving, the guider will also talk to the person being guided to provide additional information about any immediate hazards.

Staff or volunteers providing sighted guiding support should first follow their organisation’s policies and guidance in doing so.

## 1. Protecting different groups of people

This advice is aimed at all blind and partially sighted people, and sighted guiders who are fit and well, confident about guiding practice, and following [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do) and, if appropriate, their own organisation’s guidance.

Extremely clinically vulnerable blind and partially sighted people, who were previously shielding, should continue to be cautious, even if they have been fully vaccinated, and follow “[19 July guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/19-july-guidance-on-protecting-people-who-are-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-from-covid-19)”.

## 2. Who should help you

You can receive support from anyone. However, you can reduce the risk to yourself and those around you by being guided by someone in your household, or a Personal Assistant (if you have one), friend or carer to keep the number of people involved as low as possible,

## 3. What everyone should take account of to minimise the risks while guiding

With the rise of new variants, even fully vaccinated people can still spread the coronavirus. Everyone involved should continue to follow “[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do)” guidance by:

* keeping good hand hygiene and washing them more frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, or using hand sanitizer, particularly whenever you enter or leave a building, touch a surface, and before and after putting a face covering on or off, or touching your face;
* avoiding touching the face unnecessarily, particularly eyes, nose and mouth;
* catching coughs and sneezes in the crook of the elbow of your free arm, or a disposable tissue, and then immediately disposing of it in a waste (not recycling) bin and washing or sanitising hands;
* limiting the number, proximity and duration of contacts with people you don’t live with, particularly indoors and face-to-face;
* meeting outdoors if possible – if meeting indoors, do so in a well-ventilated area;
* observing current [guidance on the use of face coverings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own) particularly in crowded areas, when inside or travelling on public transport;
* once eligible, obtaining an [NHS COVID Pass](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-pass/) in case it’s required by a venue you plan to travel to – you can dial 119 for a paper copy if you don’t have access to the NHS App;
* if you feel more comfortable doing so, both the guider and person being guided [taking a lateral flow test](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/regular-rapid-coronavirus-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms/) prior to meeting.

## 4. What people providing guiding support to customers can do

Staff or volunteers involved should follow their own organisation’s policies and guidance, which should include the mitigation advice set out above.

In addition, people needing sighted guiding support should:

* where possible, book support in advance;
* set out what support you need;
* be prepared to give your name and contact details, if required; and
* if contacted by NHS Test and Trace, follow their advice.

The organisation providing the support should:

* be following guidance for [working safely during coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19) to minimise risks for staff and customers;
* have provided any necessary training and equipment to their staff;
* be using the NHS COVID Pass, if they have been advised to do so;
* on the day, check the person being supported hasn’t got COVID-19 symptoms and hasn’t been advised to stay at home or quarantine themselves, before providing support; and
* maintain records of the people who have been supported by each member of staff for 21 days and be prepared to provide this information to NHS Test and Trace, if needed.

## 5. Optional: wearables

If you feel more comfortable continuing to socially distance, you could use a [“Please give me space” badge](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/please-give-me-space-social-distancing-cards-or-badges).

If you want to indicate discretely that you have a hidden disability and may need additional support, you could consider using a [Sunflower lanyard](https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/).

## 5. No guiding is possible while self-isolating or quarantining

If either the person being guided or guider returns a positive Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test, is advised to self-isolate after coming into contact with someone who has tested positive, or develops COVID-19 symptoms, then “[Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)” must be followed.

If you live with, or are advised you are a contact of someone who has tested positive for the Omicron variant, you must self-isolate for 10 days, regardless of your age, vaccination status, or any negative test results.

If they are able to, all parties should follow “[Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/)” guidance. No guiding will be possible while self-isolating or quarantining.

## 6. Additional resources

You should keep up to date with advice from [RNIB’s Coronavirus updates](https://www.rnib.org.uk/coronavirus-updates), and the [Sight Advice FAQs](https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/) website. Both provide information for blind and partially sighted people on how to adjust to living with the impact of coronavirus restrictions.

The [Guide Dogs coronavirus section](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/covid19) has information for blind and partially sighted people, and for those who support them, and has tips for getting out and about.

[Sight Loss Councils](https://www.sightlosscouncils.org.uk/resources), supported by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, have an online resources section with a range of guides that may be useful.

## Contact

For further information please contact

### Email: [campaigns@RNIB.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@RNIB.org.uk)

### Telephone RNIB’s Helpline: 0303 123 9999